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ENGLAND AND THE WAR.

BY SYDNEY BROOKS.

PERHAPS the wisest word that has yet been said on the present conflict between Japan and Russia is the application to it of Hegel's famous formula. It is not a struggle between right and wrong, but between right and right; or, to expand and emphasize the phrase, it is a struggle between might and might, between necessity and necessity. It was the fate, but in no way the fault, of Russia and Japan to be so placed that policies, deemed not merely profitable but absolutely essential by each, could be neither prosecuted without the certainty of conflict nor abandoned without a sacrifice such as no nation will peacefully submit to. Their antagonism from first to last has been in no sense artificial, or spasmodic, but permanent, deep-seated and unavoidable. And being so, one may add by way of parenthesis, the present war, whichever way it ends, cannot finally disarm or suppress it. To suppose otherwise is altogether to underestimate the forces that have necessitated it. For our day and generation, the issue may be decisive enough; but an antipathy of fundamental interests so vital as that which has driven Russia and Japan to arms is beyond compromise or adjustment, and the issues involved in it are too inseparably bound up with the first principles of national existence to be settled off-hand by a few campaigns.

To realize that this must be so, and to gauge the unalterable character of the factors that make up the problem, it is almost enough to supplement a glance at the map with the most elementary knowledge of Russia and Japan. To Japan, with her rapidly growing population, her restricted area and the change she is undergoing from a mainly agricultural to a mainly industrial State, unhampered intercourse with Corea is a commercial necessity. Corea is the Japanese granary, the outlet for Japanese

colonization, and the chosen and zealously exploited field for Japanese industrial expansion. Nowhere in the world is the Japanese stake so heavy. The overwhelming bulk of the banks, railways, shipping, domestic trade and financial interests of the Hermit Kingdom is in Japanese hands. Sentimental and historical bonds re-enforce the more tangible ties of commerce and emigration. But above and beyond them all is the dominating influence of strategy. A foreign Power established on the Korean peninsula would be a permanent and intolerable menace to Japanese security. Russia in Corea, it has often and truly been said, could starve or strangle Japan, or do both at will. The "arrow pointed at Japan's heart," fitted in a Russian bowstring and held by a Russian hand, would by its mere possibilities paralyze Japan's initiative, bankrupt her with the necessity of guarding against such a result, and reduce the Mikado to an ignoble vassalage. Ever since the new Japan came to a sense of its position and power, there has on this matter been but one determination—Corea must be either independent or Japanese. In literal and solemn truth, this is felt to be an issue of life or death. "Corea," said an eminent Japanese statesman, "must be Russian or Japanese, and to make it the latter every one of Japan's two hundred and fifty thousand soldiers will die, if need be, to achieve this victory for his Emperor, this act of international justice, this guarantee of the safety of the Japanese nation. And, after our soldiers are gone, the nation itself—man, woman and child—will battle, forty millions of us, till the last yen is gone and the last life yielded. It is with us no statesman's policy; it is with us the settled purpose and the burning passion of a people."

Here, obviously, is one of those primal and inexorable forces that cannot be guided, that can scarcely be restrained, by any statesmanship. And has there not for years been advancing from the opposite direction a force equally instinctive, equally uncontrollable? No one who has studied the history and character of Russian expansion over Northern Asia—as irrepressible, spontaneous, almost unconscious in its beginnings as the instinct which drove the English to plant their colonies by every sea—will hesitate long for an answer. If, through this movement, one can detect the thread of any high and deliberate political motive, it is the legitimate one of finding an outlet to the water. What limits can be set to its colossal march? The only frontier, it has long

been agreed, that Russia will recognize is the frontier imposed by nature or a stronger Power. The absorption of Corea was to Russia simply the next, and in that direction the last, stride onward in her imperial progress. And what instinct prompted, policy confirmed. The Corean peninsula is a wedge driven in between Vladivostock and Port Arthur. Without the control of either shore of the Straits, Russia could not feel herself strategically secure, and all the impulse of her past and the commanding necessities of the present must finally have tempted her to secure the essential connecting link. This, of course, is not to claim that Corea was or could be a matter of the paramount necessity to Russia that it always must be to Japan. But the possession of it would be an asset of such extraordinary importance, the loss of it would be a disadvantage so decisive and permanent in its character, that any Power in Russia's situation would be justified in fighting for Corea if there were a reasonable prospect of success. The domination of the Peninsula by Japan would tragically duplicate for Russia in the Far East the very dangers which threaten her from England in the Persian Gulf and from Germany in the Baltic. Indeed, it would do more. It would not only decide against her the naval supremacy of the Pacific, but it would install on the flank of her sole line of communication, the Manchurian railway, a resolute and highly organized enemy. And this, so far as it goes, is the true answer to those light-hearted solutions of the Russo-Japanese difficulties that were based upon handing over Manchuria to Russia and Corea to Japan. Such a solution might have been a postponement, but it could not have been a settlement. Russia could not permanently acquiesce in the absorption of Corea by Japan without surrendering for good and all the freedom of her outlet on the Pacific. Japan could as little tolerate a perpetual occupation of Manchuria by the Russians without a jeopardy to her future position in Corea as certain and formidable as it is now veiled and inchoate. Russia, again, was peremptorily bound to decline to withdraw from Manchuria unless she was prepared to retire altogether from the Far East, to sacrifice the Manchurian railway. Fundamentally, the ultimate domination or guardianship of China is the stake at issue between Russia and Japan, and in the game that has been played for it Manchuria has been one counter among many. With a prize so vast and vital, with in-

terests clashing with such deadly and irreconcilable antagonism, it were of little utility to follow the course of the negotiations, to attempt to apportion the blame for the resultant issue in war. On the hypothesis, neither Russia nor Japan is to blame at all. Each followed the route prescribed by national interests, and the routes led to a point where retreat was out of the question.

But, if it was beyond the capacity of even the most skilled diplomacy altogether to avert war, the responsibility for bringing war on at this particular moment must largely rest with Great Britain. But for the Anglo-Japanese Alliance the Far East might have remained at peace for another decade and more. The average opinion of the world which, overriding official protestations, persisted in seeing in that Alliance a menace to Russia and an encouragement to Japan to fight Russia, was undoubtedly correct. To deny that the Alliance hurried on the crisis and almost guaranteed its development before the allotted five years were past, is to deny that the support of the greatest naval Power in the world, the certainty that any such coalition as stepped in after the Chinese war to rob Japan of the fruits of victory was forestalled and made impossible, and the isolation of Russia, had any weight at all in the councils of Tokyo. The mere fact of the Treaty made it certain that Japan would seize the first favorable opportunity to strike home, and no amount of sophistication can really acquit Lord Lansdowne of having, as it were, fixed a time-limit within which the inevitable should come to pass. That the bulk of public opinion in England supported the Alliance at the time of its formation, and supports it now, is, I think, beyond question. But it is also clear that English statesmen have taken all too little trouble to educate the nation in the immediate responsibilities that the Alliance lays upon Great Britain and in the possibilities that may accrue from it. The approval with which the Treaty was hailed was a dangerously uninstructed approval. After several years of singularly unstable and inefficient diplomacy in the Far East, resulting in a progressive diminution of British prestige, it was an immense relief to find that the British Government had at last made up its mind and definitely committed itself. Public opinion was perhaps less concerned with the specific terms and obligations of the Alliance than with the fact that British diplomacy was henceforward to pursue a fixed and deliberate course. The popular

enthusiasm for Japan, then, as now, a strong and pervasive sentiment among all classes in England, contributed its quota, and it was re-enforced by the equally strong and pervasive antipathy to Russia. No one can doubt that in this war the Japanese have the overwhelming sympathy of England at their backs. This sympathy is accompanied by a national determination to live up to the obligations of the Alliance. England profoundly believes in the capacity of Japan to thrash Russia; and she has no doubt that her own share in the conflict will be confined to the strict neutrality agreed upon in Article II. of the Alliance. I think it no way an exaggeration to say that the possibility of England's being dragged into the war has yet scarcely occurred to popular opinion. The expression of pro-Japanese sentiment has been consequently almost unrestrained.

Nevertheless, there have always been those who objected to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, not only on principle but on its specific demerits. Their objections were based, first of all, on the proposition that a world-wide Empire like the British, liable at any moment to find itself at issue with one or more first-class Powers over questions of vital moment, could only be safely conducted by declining to be placed in the position where an ally could decide which of two questions was the more important to British interests. Secondly, it was urged that the Alliance was unequal, that the integrity of China and Corea, though important, was not vital to Great Britain in the sense in which it was vital to Japan, and that British policy wherever England and Russia were in conflict was placed at the mercy of Japan. Thirdly, it was urged that the Alliance was, in effect, a direct blow to Russia, officially stopped the movement towards an Anglo-Russian understanding, imperilled English relations with France, and played into the hands of Germany. Finally, it was objected that the Alliance was unnecessary, that the integrity of China was in no real danger, that Russia's position in Manchuria was essentially similar to that of England in Egypt, and that the maintenance of Japanese power could have been safeguarded by naval guarantees protecting each party from the attack of a coalition. "An exchange of naval guarantees upon equal terms for all Asiatic purposes," said an English writer at the time, "would have been, under all the circumstances, necessary and advisable. To make an engagement which, if we plunge below its verbiage to its prac-

tical meaning, binds us to back the continental expansion of Japan and to resist the effective occupation on the part of Russia of the territory traversed by the vital extremity of the Siberian Railway, this is what was not advisable and was not necessary." The force of these considerations is, I think, manifest. They did not, nor do they now, enter to any appreciable extent into popular calculations. From the English masses, always lamentably indifferent to foreign affairs and with little or no sense of the unity of external policy, anything like a reasoned appreciation of England's position is not to be looked for. The Government, face to face with a war which it was presumably one of the objects of the Alliance to avert, has lost some of its optimism, but appears otherwise unmoved. There remains, however, a small but authoritative body of opinion which, while hoping for the best, sees in the present dilemma the confirmation of its worst fears, and is harassed by the suspicion that the Government and country are far from realizing the magnitude of the perils that surround them.

To what does England stand committed? There is no misunderstanding the terms of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. The essential articles in the Agreement are Articles II. and III. By Article II. it is provided that, if either Great Britain or Japan becomes involved in war with another Power, the other will maintain a strict neutrality and use its efforts to prevent other Powers from joining in hostilities against its ally. Should any other Power or Powers join in hostilities against that ally, the other High Contracting Party is bound by Article III. to come to its assistance, to conduct the war in common and to make peace in mutual agreement with it. Lord Lansdowne, in his covering despatch to the British Minister in Tokyo, explained, with admirable clearness, that that part of the Agreement "which renders either of the High Contracting Parties liable to be called upon by the other for assistance, can operate only when one of the allies has found himself obliged to go to war in defence of interests which are common to both, when the circumstances in which he has taken this step are such as to establish that the quarrel has not been of his own seeking, and when, being engaged in his own defence, he finds himself threatened, not by a single Power, but by a hostile coalition." On the letter of the Treaty, therefore, there can be no doubt of England's duty in the present

stage of the war. It is simply that of keeping the course clear, and of doing all it can by diplomacy to prevent France from coming to Russia's assistance. At first sight, no obligation could well seem easier to carry out. With France, as with England, the Far-Eastern question, at all events in its immediate phase, is a secondary interest. Moreover, England and France are at this moment enjoying a period of almost halcyon amity. The relations between France and England began automatically to improve when the explosion of anger with which England greeted the Anglo-German compact in Venezuela made it clear that the British people were set on cutting loose from German influences. And the improvement has continued without any factitious or outside assistance. On both sides of the Channel there has been a disposition on the part of average men to examine the foundations of their disputes, and to see whether, after all, there is so much in them as they have been pretending. A course of quiet reflection, the absence of all immediately pressing differences, and the visits between President Loubet and King Edward, have sensibly made for an exchange of juster estimates. The old suspiciousness has now, on the English side completely, and on the French, too, very largely, withered away. The relations between England and France, in short, are at this moment precisely as every sensible Englishman and every sensible Frenchman would have them; and to both nations the change in the point of view and the new temper in which they approach their mutual difficulties are political assets of the very first order.

France is the ally of Russia and England the ally of Japan, but neither Power is constrained, either by the letter or the spirit of its agreements, to take up arms. If the one refrains, the other will refrain. The solution, therefore, is easy on the surface. Let France and England agree to remain neutral; let each present a silent immobility; let each, as it were, check the other. It is a solution so simple, sensible and sufficient that one immediately begins to suspect it. Politics, international politics especially, are not quite so mathematical and adjustable as all that. The great strength of this solution is that it plainly restricts the area of warfare and preserves peace in Europe; its great error is that it depends on the statics and not the dynamics of the situation, that it presupposes in the Far East a perpetuity of indecisiveness, and overlooks the possibility, nay the certainty,

of the derangement of victory. Before the fortune of war has inclined overwhelmingly to either side, it needs no great self-restraint for England and France to watch the conflict with folded arms. But how will it be when either Russia or Japan has gained an indisputable mastery? Can France afford to stand by and see Russia beaten? Can England afford to stand by and see Japan crushed? At the moment when one or the other of these contingencies is an actual fact, the appeal to the strict letter of the Treaty will have lost its force. Other influences will then come into play, influences of permanent politics, of national necessities, perhaps of uncontrollable popular pressure, certainly of national pride and loyalty; and the question that underlies this Russo-Japanese conflict is whether these influences will be powerful enough to override the formal and prudential policy prescribed by a merely literal reading of Treaty obligations.

It is worth remembering, to take the French case first, that the publication of the Anglo-Japanese Agreement was swiftly followed by a Franco-Russian declaration of common purposes in the Far East:—

“Being obliged to take into consideration the possible eventuality either of aggressive action on the part of a third Power (*i. e.*, Japan), or fresh troubles in China calling in question the integrity and the free development of China, becoming a menace to their own interests, the two Allied Governments reserve to themselves the right to concert in such case means for assuring their protection.”

This declaration, if it meant anything, meant that France and Russia had agreed to stand together, and that the Dual Alliance was no less operative on the Gulf of Pechili than on the frontiers of Alsace-Lorraine. Will its obligations, not merely its written and immediate obligations, but those that are injected into it by circumstances, be wholly fulfilled if France confines herself to checkmating England? Will not a series of Russian reverses, preluding a final defeat, lay upon France an irresistible compulsion to positive action? The French have a profound interest in Russia's success or failure and a national desire to see her win. It is said that in France the Dual Alliance has lost something of its old popularity, that the nation as a whole, and the provinces especially, have chilled towards it, and that only the boulevards retain the enthusiasm of the pre-Fashoda days. There is some truth in that, but not much. In spite of the progressive weaken-

ing of the Triple Alliance and the growing cordiality towards Italy and England, the Dual Alliance remains the corner-stone of French foreign policy. Its alleged one-sidedness is more discussed abroad than in France. The enormous Russian loans raised on the Bourse, and the investments of the French middle classes in Russian industrials, have somewhat blinded the world to an appreciation of the invaluable benefits France has derived from her share in the partnership. Those benefits might all be summed up in a word, the word that Pitt used to crystallize the one object that England aimed at in hunting down Napoleon—"security." France is secure, and not only France but the French Republic. The Alliance removed, once and for all, the charge of political dowdiness which its enemies were continually bringing against the Republic. The moral effect of treating on equal terms with the greatest Power in Europe was worth almost anything to the nervous, sensitive, self-conscious temperament of the French. The Alliance has strengthened internal, and guaranteed external, peace. It has lifted the awful horror of invasion, the sickening sense of helplessness, under the blight of which the nation, a bare fifteen or twenty years ago, was rebuilding itself as from nothing. No other political combination could give France what the Dual Alliance has given her, and the consciousness of this, though it may be concealed, is never really absent from the French mind. In the event of a Russian defeat, there would unquestionably be a strong and sustained movement throughout France against the "betrayal" of her ally. The position of a French Government is never a very strong one; and it would have to face not only the popular fear that if France abandoned Russia in the Far East, Russia might hereafter abandon France in Europe, not only the unescapable conviction that a Russian collapse must react on the fortunes of France and by so much diminish her security, not only the attacks of the Nationalist Opposition who see in war their last chance of ousting the present *régime*, but also the danger that Germany might come to Russia's assistance while France was hesitating, and so fatally undermine the vitality of the Dual Alliance. It is, indeed, an open question whether a secret agreement does not already exist between Germany and Russia, pledging the former, in return for some commercial and territorial concessions, to help the latter to the utmost limits compatible with a formal show of

neutrality. If such an agreement exists, the position of the French Government would be so hazardous, and the force of popular opinion would be so strong, as to make a decisive rally to the Russian side more than probable. No one who soberly estimates the factors I have enumerated and who further considers the possibility, even though it may be only a remote one, that China, fired by Japan's success, may combine with her against the common foe, will be rash enough to assert that the neutrality of France is secured beyond all doubt or chance.

On the other hand, supposing that the war ends or threatens to end in a Japanese defeat, will it be possible for England to remain a passive spectator of an event that would shake her influence, and still more her prestige, from one end of Asia to the other? Is not the maintenance of the power of Japan a British interest? Is there, indeed, any British interest in the Far East stronger than this? Mr. Balfour declared that Great Britain could not permit the destruction of Japan under any circumstances. The Alliance did no more than publicly commit her to a policy already prescribed by the elements of Far-Eastern politics. It added nothing to the argumentative strength of that policy, but it immensely increased the necessity of seeing that it did not fail. British influence, not merely in China but throughout her Asiatic dominions, could never recover the fatal loss of prestige that would follow a failure to spring full-armed to the side of her ally if the need arose. Indeed, there are Englishmen to whom already this is so axiomatic that they have even urged the Government to take up arms at once, and brave the risk of French intervention, sooner than lose the strategic advantage of being able to take the offensive. The country, it is true, has not yet thought out what is to happen if Japan is palpably worsted, and I am not sure that the Government has. But it may be safely prophesied that if and when the question becomes critical, it will be solved in the only way compatible with British honor and British interests. Therein lurks the terrible danger of this strange and momentous conflict to the peace of Europe. The neutrality of France, in the event of a Russian defeat, is at the best a dubious choice between distasteful alternatives. England's neutrality depends on the sea-power of Japan.

SYDNEY BROOKS.